



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



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POST TRAUMATIC STRESS INJURY AWARENESS DAY

At the request of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Governor Kristi Noem has proclaimed June 27, 2020, as "Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day," a day to reflect on the causes, symptoms and treatment of post-traumatic stress injuries.

"The brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces who proudly serve the United States and risk their lives to protect our freedom deserve the investment of every possible resource to ensure their lasting physical, mental, and emotional well-being," the Governor's proclamation states.

PTSI, which is commonly known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, is a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances and affects more than 5 million Americans each year. It is most commonly associated with veterans – and has been known by many other terms, including shell shock and combat fatigue – but PTSI can affect anyone at any age.

"Our veterans face many life-changing and dangerous situations when they put their lives on the line in defense of our nation's freedoms," said Greg Whitlock, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "Raising awareness of PTSI is an important step in ensuring veterans have the support they need to make a successful transition back to civilian life. This will help with increased understanding of unseen emotional struggles resulting from PTSI and is critical to the health and well-being of our returning heroes."

It is estimated that between 11 and 20 percent of veterans experience symptoms of PTSI, including up to 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

"Every veteran processes their military experiences differently, but for those that are experiencing nightmares, flashbacks, irritability or other symptoms of PTSI, help is available," said Whitlock. "Specialized treatment for PTSI is available through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs at <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/>."



MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY WHITLOCK

Over the past four months we, as a nation, have been adjusting and trying to discover our new “norm.” The Coronavirus pandemic changed our lives in so many ways and forced us to meet challenges head-on and be creative and discover new potentials. I’m proud to say that our team at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs stayed the course and continued our day-to-day operations in assisting our veterans and their families.

Veterans needs differ from one era to the next and it is important that we identify their needs and find solutions to enhance their lives. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges they face is the unseen injury - Post Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI). Our country has been working to solve this injury since the Civil War. Whether diagnosed as Da Costas Syndrome, shell shock, battle fatigue, post-Vietnam Syndrome or PTSI, they all are related to combat exposure and we owe it to our troops to assist them as they and their families face this challenge.



Our young men and women that serve must know that their sacrifice is appreciated, their courage is honored, and we are here to help them transition back to civilian life. They must know that there are resources to help them when they return. As such, Governor Noem will be proclaiming June 27, 2020, as “Post Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day” in South Dakota.

This Awareness Day is a great opportunity to reflect on the causes, symptoms, and treatment of PTSI. Awareness can be divided into three themes - learn, connect, and share. Help us take the mystery out of PTSI by learning more about the invisible wounds and the resources that are available. Everyone can help.

There are many resources available to help veterans, including: one-to-one mental health assessment and testing, one-to-one therapy for both the veteran and their family, group therapy, medication, vet centers, and telehealth. Veterans who have questions or concerns regarding PTSI are encouraged to reach out to their local county or tribal veterans service officer or our office 605-773-3269.

Let us never forget the brave spirit of those who founded the United States of America and the men and women who continue to ensure our freedom. They embodied the fighting spirit, courage, the determination and the willingness to put it all on the line for us and for this Nation.

VA STUDY FINDS TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM WORTHWHILE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released results of the first long-term study aimed at determining the effectiveness of the VA Transition Assistance Program (TAP) — and its impact on veterans in their civilian life.

The [2019 Post-Separation Transition Assistance Program Assessment \(PSTAP\) Outcome Study Report](#), and appendices, commissioned by the Veterans Benefits Administration, outlines the results from the first year of a multi-year study.

Designed to assess what drives veteran satisfaction in TAP, the study identifies how best to improve the veteran experience and the delivery of benefits and services — ultimately improving their long-term outcomes across various aspects of their lives.

Cross-sectional surveys were created to get feedback in response to the research. It looks at service member transition in three groups: veterans separated for six months, those separated for one year and those separated for three years. The survey uses data from these groups to obtain feedback annually, while tracking transition outcome success of those who opt-in to the longer-term study.

2019 survey results revealed:

- The majority of veterans found TAP courses beneficial.
- The TAP VA benefits briefings received an 85% positive rating and were deemed most useful by respondents.
- Most respondents (67%) said they adjusted well to civilian life after separation, are making progress toward their post-military goals and generally employed in full-time, permanent positions.
- Many veterans (70%) felt the transition was challenging with an array of causes, including nostalgia for the camaraderie and teamwork they experienced in the military.

The study and surveys were developed and conducted in coordination with the TAP interagency group, led by the VA, the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor.

Approximately 200,000 service members transition from the military each year. TAP provides information, resources, and tools to service members and their loved ones to help prepare for the move from military to civilian life.

Service members begin TAP no later than one year prior to separation or up to two years prior to retiring. The VA portion of TAP features an in depth briefing and available one-on-one assistance by benefits advisors who help transitioning service members understand the benefits and services earned.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Transition and Economic Development (TED)

Post-Separation Transition Assistance
Program (TAP) Assessment (PSTAP)

**2019 Cross-Sectional
Survey Report**

VA VIDEO CONNECT VISITS INCREASED 1000% DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced telehealth video appointments using [VA Video Connect](#) increased from approximately 10,000 to 120,000 appointments a week between February and May of 2020.

This increase of 1000% is attributed to the VA providers and veterans taking precautions against COVID-19.

“As we near the three-year anniversary of the launch of VA Video Connect, even during these challenging times, the VA has and continues to maintain access to high-quality health care for veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As the service becomes more popular, the VA remains committed to providing a seamless user experience to ensure veterans have access to care where and when they need it.”

VA Video Connect allows veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet, or mobile device with



VETERANS

VA Video Connect

3.6 ★★★★★ Average: 3.6 (512 votes)



an internet connection. It is one of the largest and most successful digital health platforms in the nation and currently enables more than 25,000 virtual appointments, including [mental health appointments](#) each day.

The VA is also taking strides to bridge the digital divide for veterans who lack the technology or broadband internet connectivity required to participate in VA telehealth services. More than 26,000 cellular-enabled tablets are currently distributed to veterans across the country. Major wireless carriers T-Mobile, Sprint, now part of T-Mobile, *SafeLink* by Tracfone and Verizon are allowing veterans to access VA telehealth services without incurring data charges.

Due to increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA is rapidly expanding VA Video Connect, allowing more veterans and VA care teams to connect by video. During this time, veterans using VA Video Connect with limited data plans could temporarily experience data charges. While, cellular carriers are taking measures to support veterans during this period of expansion — veterans with concerns are encouraged to contact their carrier.

VA AND GO2 FOUNDATION FOR LUNG CANCER PARTNER

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has partnered with nonprofit [GO₂Foundation for Lung Cancer](#) to increase awareness about lung screening options and improve outcomes for veterans impacted by lung cancer.

This partnership allows for the VA and GO₂ to leverage resources, programs and services available through GO₂Foundation's national network of more than 750 centers of excellence.

"Research and initiatives to ensure access to early detection and treatment will greatly improve the care of veterans with lung cancer," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This public-private partnership will help expand the array of services that are currently available within the VA and increase public awareness about veteran-specific conditions that place veterans at greater risk for lung cancer."



The VA diagnoses 7,700 veterans with lung cancer each year and an estimated 900,000 remain at risk due to age, smoking, and other environmental exposures during and after military service.

"This important milestone allows us to share with the VA our many years of experience developing best practices for lung cancer screening and care to help improve outcomes for veterans impacted by this disease," said CEO, Co-founder and President of GO₂Foundation Laurie Fenton Ambrose.

The VA will help educate staff at GO₂ Foundation screening centers about veteran-specific health factors related to lung cancer risk, prevention, and response to treatment; share information about applying for VA health care and benefits; and provide access to suicide prevention resources.

This partnership will also provide the VA with additional resources from the GO₂ Foundation to help support lung screening program implementation, professional development training, and veteran education. Many of these [GO₂ Foundation resources are available online](#) and support social distancing guidelines designed to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The collaboration is managed by the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention and facilitated by the Veterans Health Administration Office of Community Engagement. For more information, visit [health partnerships](#).

VA REACHES ONE MILLION VETERANS AND FAMILY MEMBERS THROUGH TELE- TOWN HALL MEETINGS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has reached more than one million veterans and family members through telephone town hall meetings held with states across the country.

The weekly meetings highlight VA benefits and give beneficiaries an opportunity to communicate directly with VA Under Secretary for Benefits Paul R. Lawrence, Ph.D.

“The town hall meetings are an effective way to interact with veterans and their beneficiaries,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Outreach to veterans is part of our mission and making sure they know about the benefits they have earned is one of the ways we deliver our promise to them.”



Lawrence, who briefs listeners and takes questions from callers, conducts the meetings to ensure veterans have accurate and up-to-date information. As of June 16, VBA has conducted 25 tele-town halls.

The briefings include updates about VA's response to COVID-19 and the GI Bill along with the launch of Blue Water Navy Act, Solid Start program and other new initiatives to include the Veterans Benefits Banking Program — helping veterans to understand and access all services and benefits earned. Veterans and family members are encouraged to join and ask questions about their benefits at 844-227-7557.

Lawrence will continue the [telephone town hall meetings](#) sharing steps VA is taking to support veterans and keep employees safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRESIDENT TRUMP RELEASES PREVENTS ROADMAP

The U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the release of the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS), an historic, nationwide plan to raise awareness about mental health, connect veterans and others at risk of suicide to federal and local resources, and facilitate focused and coordinated research into suicide.

The roadmap is the result of an Executive Order President Trump signed March 5, 2019, calling on the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Health and Human Services and several others to develop a comprehensive strategy for ending the national tragedy of suicide.

The order was signed as data continue to show 132 Americans, including 20 service members, former never federally activated Guard and Reserve members, and veterans; die on average each day by suicide.

"Veteran suicide is a tragedy this country started measuring in the decades following the Civil War, but one that sadly went unaddressed for generations," said President Trump. "Today, my administration is taking steps to ensure the men and women who bravely fought for us when they were called will be given the care and attention, they need during some of their darkest hours. Our veterans will lead the way for all Americans as we end the stigma that for too long has kept us from talking openly about mental health and thwarted our efforts to provide the kind of assistance and support that will save lives."

"Suicide prevention is VA's highest clinical priority, and the department is taking significant steps to address the issue," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "But just as there is no single cause of suicide, no single organization can end veteran suicide alone. That's why PREVENTS aims to bring together stakeholders across all levels of government and in the private sector to work side by side to provide our veterans with the mental health and suicide prevention services they need. By employing a public-health approach to suicide prevention, President Trump's roadmap will equip communities to help Veterans get the right care, whenever and wherever they need it."

The PREVENTS Task Force is co-chaired by White House Domestic Policy Council Director Brooke Rollins and Secretary Wilkie, and the roadmap released calls for several steps to be taken to further this critical national goal, many of which are already underway:

National Suicide Prevention Activation Campaign

This summer, the PREVENTS Task Force will launch a nationwide public health campaign aimed at educating Americans that suicide is preventable, creating awareness of mental health and suicide prevention best practices with a call to action for ALL Americans to take the PREVENTS Pledge to Prevent Suicide. A primary goal of the campaign is to change the culture surrounding issues related to suicide and mental health. The campaign will stress everyone has a role to play in the well-being of family members, friends and coworkers. It will create awareness about risk and protective factors and encourage people to reach out to those who may be struggling.

The campaign will rely on coordinated messaging from all levels of government and non-government partners, as well as national digital, radio and television public service announcements. Efforts will focus on dissemination in states with a high concentration of veterans. It will also rely on high-profile ambassadors who will help amplify these messages, including Second Lady Karen Pence, and U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams.

(continued on next page)

PREVENTS ROADMAP (CONTINUED)

Improving Suicide Prevention Research

Too often, efforts have focused on a one-size-fits-all approach to suicide prevention that fails to consider an individual's specific risk factors. As a key element of the roadmap, PREVENTS will launch the National Research Strategy to accelerate the development and implementation of effective solutions to help prevent Veteran suicide.

A critical first step toward this goal is the optimization of the current research ecosystem, which will accelerate the impact of veteran suicide research by enhancing interagency collaboration, evaluating the role of open science practices, leveraging team science and enhancing data resources and analysis. The PREVENTS Task Force will have an initial assessment of the current research landscape by the end of 2020 and will simultaneously work with Task Force agencies and non-governmental partners to begin moving toward this exciting goal.

The development of the National Research Strategy will result in an increase in focus on the isolation of risk factors and an identification of the most effective treatment practices and interventions for veterans. This all of government and all of nation approach will lead to a dramatic shift in the ability to prevent suicide for veterans and all Americans.

Building Partnerships

The PREVENTS Task Force has built relationships with dozens of organizations across the country, including faith-based groups, universities, non-profits, corporations, small businesses as well as state and local governments. The Task Force will continue to expand these relationships in order to share best practices for promoting mental health, ensuring awareness of and access to federal, state, local and tribal resources, and coordinating and implementing the public awareness campaign across sectors. The Task Force will encourage all 50 states, the U.S. Territories and the District of Columbia to sign the PREVENTS proclamation affirming their commitment to preventing suicide among veterans and all of their citizens.

The PREVENTS Task Force has already connected with more than 150 known community boards, 27 statewide suicide prevention teams and Building Healthy Military Communities, a pilot initiative with seven partnering states. The Task Force has also completed an initial analysis of funding that will be available for suicide prevention efforts. During the next several months, PREVENTS will be implementing a plan to improve coordination among grant programs and develop a strategy to fill gaps through additional funding as well as additional public-private partnerships.

The PREVENTS Task Force is working with communities and stakeholders to develop and further efforts focused on coordinated systems of care. Government and non-government entities alike have a critical role to play in ensuring a comprehensive system of support.

View the president's roadmap and find more information about the PREVENTS Task Force here: www.va.gov/PREVENTS.

PREVENTS

[Home](#) [Executive Order 13861](#) [Task Force](#) [PREVENTS Office](#) [Accomplishments](#) [Get Involved](#) [Resources](#)

PREVENTS

The President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans
and End a National Tragedy of Suicide



UPDATES ON SOME OF SDDVA'S ON-GOING CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

Below are some photo shots on construction progress at the South Dakota State Veterans Cemetery. Administrative building and committal shelter walls are going up!



At the State Veterans Home, progress is being made on the solar panel project! Second row of solar panels are being installed.





Join the next

Virtual

VETERANS TOWN HALL

Monday, June 22 @ 5:00pm

— Sioux Falls VA Health Care System —

Details on Facebook @VASiouxFalls

Join the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System for a Virtual Town Hall on Monday, June 22, at 5:00 p.m. (CT) via Zoom for Government.

Lisa Simoneau, Director for the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System, and Robert McDivitt, Network Director for the VA Midwest Health Care Network, will provide an update on operations at the Sioux Falls VA.

To join the Zoom meeting, use this link: <https://www.zoomgov.com/j/1609958973...>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jun 21—Fathers Day

Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre

Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Sep 3-7—SD State Fair

Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Dec 1—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception



Happy Father's Day. You have
always been my hero!

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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